

# Legal SCENE

By Ron Hocevar  
Scott County Attorney



## Domestic violence way too common

Last month, I had the opportunity to provide a donation on behalf of the Scott County Attorney's Office (SCAO) to the Southern Valley Alliance for Battered Women (SVABW). This important organization provides crisis support, advocacy, and education to victims of domestic violence and their children. SVABW partners with law enforcement, county legal systems (including the SCAO), and care providers of Scott and Carver counties to make them a better place to live. SVABW and the Scott County Attorney's Office Victim Services personnel work closely with each other in supporting victims and assisting them through the criminal justice system.

As you can imagine, being a victim of an assault, rape, or other crime perpetrated by a husband, boyfriend, someone you loved... maybe still love... or the father of your children would be extremely upsetting, to say the least. Now that victim faces the prospect of not having a home, not having the breadwinner in the home, not being able to pay the bills, and no help with the children, just to name a few of the obstacles a victim may



**County Attorney Ron Hocevar (at right) and his staff work closely with Mary Ann Bigaouette and her staff from the Southern Valley Alliance for Battered Women. The County Attorney's Office recently provided a \$7,000 check to the SVABW to help provide victim services.**

face. On top of that, a victim is then invited in the County Attorney's Office and told she has to take the witness stand and testify in front of a group of strangers and in the presence of the individual she thought she loved (and likely still loves) about what happened to her. SVABW and the employees in my office, together, assist that victim during that process and make it as comfortable as possible.

Domestic violence is never acceptable, and -- by any measure -- is far too prevalent. To put it in perspective: The number of American troops kills in Afghanistan and Iraq between 2001 and 2012 was 6,488; the number of American women who were murdered by current or former male partners during that same time was 11,766. Every day in the United States, three women are murdered by their current or former male partners. In Minnesota, from 2013 - 2016, at least 81 women have died from domestic violence. (The term "at least" is used due to the statistics relying on public records, and not all records will

reflect the relationship of the parties involved. Certain segments of the population will go unreported in the mainstream media.)

Unfortunately, while writing this article, the SCAO charged Sergey Balandin with second-degree murder for allegedly killing his girlfriend in the home they shared in Shakopee. Balandin's girlfriend was the third woman killed in an act of domestic violence in the Twin Cities over the very week he was charged.

In 2015, the SVABW worked on 498 Scott County cases of domestic violence. In 2016, that number was 472; and as of October of 2017, that number is 423. These numbers do not include the cases arising out of Carver County, which SVABW also services.

The SCAO deals with many of the same victims as SVABW, but not all. The SCAO only deals with the victims in which the incident has been reported to law enforcement. Many victims of domestic violence will go to SVABW for help, but may choose not to report to law enforcement, and a great many don't seek help at all. In the chart provided below, you can see the numbers, by year and month, of the incidents the SCAO and the victim advocate in this office deal with.

Why don't some victims seek help from organizations such as SVABW, law enforcement, friends, or other family members? Simply stated, they feel they should



SmartLink provides door-to-door service. Call ahead for a reservation. Weekend and evening rides are now available.

## Any County resident can reserve a ride on SmartLink Transit

Did you know the SmartLink buses are available for *anyone* to ride? SmartLink staff recently discovered that many residents in Scott County don't realize the SmartLink buses running about town are available for everyone to ride. That's right -- anyone can call to schedule a ride!

Keep in mind the buses are not a taxi service, but rather a reservation-based bus service available for anyone who may not have access to a vehicle or a reliable ride to their destination. Generally, reservations are booked two to seven days in advance, and service includes door-to-door pick up and drop off. Dial-A-Ride is an affordable transportation option for individuals and families needing to get to their appointments, meetings, jobs, and even shopping destinations such as grocery, clothing, and hardware stores, and many more places throughout Scott and Carver Counties.

Here is an example where SmartLink was a great option for a local family with one vehicle. Cindy and Joe are Shakopee residents with two children, ages 3 and 4. Joe works full time, and uses the family car to travel back and forth to work each day; this leaves Cindy, a stay-at-home mom, with the challenge of finding other transportation options when she does not have access to their car. Recently, Cindy scheduled medical check-ups for her children and was not able to find a friend or family member to give them a ride on their appointment day or time. Cindy had heard about SmartLink, had often seen the buses around town, but had never used the service. Cindy called SmartLink Customer Service to inquire about a ride for her and her children to the clinic. She was very happy to find out that SmartLink was not only able to pick her and her two children up at her home, but that children 5 and under ride *free* on the SmartLink bus. Cindy, who enthusiastically confirmed that she'd use the service again, commented, "It was easier

than I thought and very affordable, I just didn't know I could use the bus."

### Benefits of riding the SmartLink bus:

- **It's easy to book a ride!** Just call Customer Service to schedule your ride. They will need to know your pick up and drop off location, and how long you anticipate being there. Customer Service can be reached at (952) 496-8341, extension 1.
- **SmartLink provides door-to-door service!** Our bus will pick you up anywhere in Scott County and deliver to your destination.
- **It's a great option for those without a vehicle** or reliable transportation.
- **Our buses run *anywhere*** in Scott and Carver Counties.
- We have **new weekend hours** on Saturday and Sunday in Scott County (7:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.) and available weeknights until 9 p.m.
- **Affordable fares are based on time of day with "peak" and "off-peak" rates:**

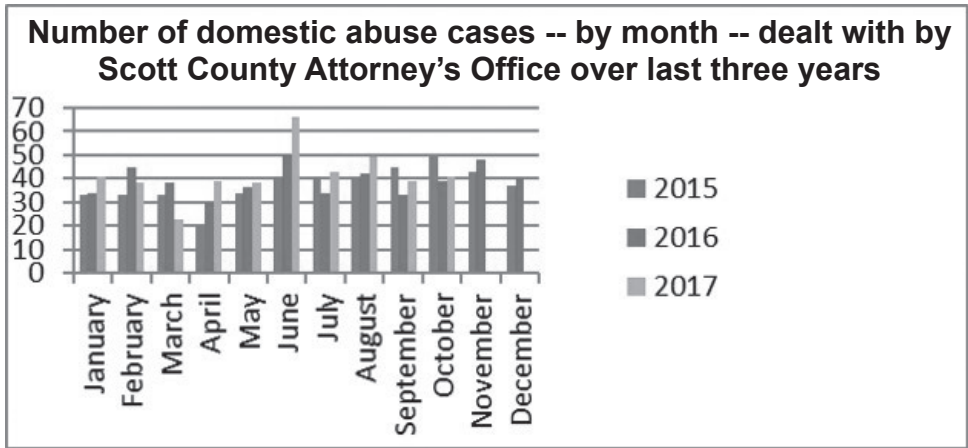


**Hours and fares**

6 – 9 a.m. and 3 - 6:30 p.m.,  
\$4.50 each way

9 a.m. – 3 p.m.,  
\$3.50 each way  
(A 75 cent distance surcharge will apply to trips greater than 15 miles.)

**New this year:**  
Weeknights (6:30-9 p.m.)  
Weekends  
(7:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.)



bear the burden of domestic violence alone. Domestic violence can tear families apart and destroy lives. Having been involved on the legal end of domestic violence for over 20 years, it is my opinion that a great many cases of domestic violence go unreported. The reasons for not reporting and remaining quiet are many -- the main reason being fear. Fear of retaliation, fear of being alone, fear of losing the main income producer, fear of being homeless, fear of being the only parent, et cetera. Additionally, victims of domestic violence can be prone to depression, anxiety, and substance abuse disorders. The longer the violence goes on, the more withdrawn and isolated the victim will become.

If anyone should become suspicious of a family member or friend being involved in a domestic violence environment, don't sit back and say it's "none of my business." Do what you can to make sure that person doesn't become another statistic in a domestic violence homicide report.

Follow me on Facebook @C.A.Hocevar & Twitter @rhocevar1